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ABSTRACT

This paper suggests that all life is polar because polarity is the underlying context of life. The idea of polarity is based on two halves that originally belonged together to form a whole. These two halves are constantly trying to come together to regain their wholeness. The philosophical view of crisis presented in this paper is that the opposite of crisis is called mental development (development of consciousness). When an individual has been successful in dealing with a crisis, he/she has gone through a process of mental development or has simply learned something that would not have been learned without the crisis. It is impossible to understand the message of a crisis unless a person is involved in one. To be in the middle of a crisis means to be learning something extraordinary. One must move mentally if one wants to move out of the crisis. From this point of view crisis is one half, and mental development, the other half. This concept is applied to the pedagogy of crisis counseling. Several case examples are discussed, and the work of Viktor Frankl, the initiator of Logotherapy, is also mentioned in relation to crisis counseling. A short discussion of dimensionality, the feeling of being caught in a dead-in with no way out is provided. The paper concludes by reminding readers to become sensitive to what life wants us to do by sending a crisis. (MKA)

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Crisis, Meaning and Consciousness

200 -word abstract

I define an accidental crisis as a breakdown within the continuity and normality of daily life. After entering a crisis, most people sponaneously ask "why?" or worse still: "why me?, why not somebody else?" This question wants to regain what has been lost for ever. There is something resembling accusation in this question. It wants destiny to repair what has happened. The way out of the crisis begins with another question, with "what for?" or "what is or could be the meaning?" Such questions spontaneously open up future perspectives. Whoever succeeds in changing the question "why" into "what for", takes the first and most difficult step out of the crisis. This change is a change in the consciousness. Every crisis is a great and unique chance for an individual to open his consciousness for developement, for something very especial. Philosophically there is a polarity between meaning and consciousness. *Polarity* means all opposite terms definitely and originally belong together. They constitute each other in such a way that one grows out of the other and vice versa (Plato, Hegel). The opposite of crisis is called *mental development* (developement of consciousness), a process which always accompanies the understanding of the meaning or message of the crisis. Whenever you have been successful in dealing with a crisis, you have also been going through a process of developing your consciousness. I am going to bring Frankl and Plato/Hegel together and show the theoretical implications of meaning.

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Bijan Amini

Crisis, Meaning and Consciousness

1. Introduction To the Problem

Gandhi's way to free India from dependence was accompanied by a number of crises and caused a huge wave of migration. Moslems and Hindus massacred each other because of religious fanaticism. This happened after the World War I. I think we have a similar situation today in Herzegovina, Palestine or elsewhere. Because of this actuality I was deeply impressed by a dialog in the film "Gandhi".

Please remember or imagine: Gandhi is fasting, he has been abstaining from food for weeks. This is why he has become very weak and is almost dying. With this self sacrifice he intends to put a halt to the senseless killing. And it seems to be working. Hindus and Moslems lay their weapons down, praying and hoping for Gandhi's life. However, the situation is still very tense. A fanatic Hindu bursts into Gandhi's room, throwing a peace of bread on his bed, and says:

Hindu: "Eat now! Eat it! I'll end like an animal anyway. But I don't want to have your death on my conscience."

Gandhi: (opening his eyes a little): "Only God decides our destiny."

Hindu: "I killed a child. You understand? I killed a child!"

Gandhi (sadly) "Why?"

Hindu: "Revenge for my son. The Moslems killed him."

Gandhi: (weak) "I know a way out of your pain. Look-out for a child who has no parents; a child whose father and mother are dead. Take that little boy and treat him like your own son. But listen, he must be a Moslem and bring him up accordingly."

After a few seconds the Hindu kneels down before Gandhi's bed and cries. His tears are obviously tears of relief. He suddenly seems to be changing from a revengeful animal to a human being. Instead of being bloodthirsty, he now seems to be touched by forgiving love. How is such a mental turn possible and how can it be explained? How can pedagogy make use of

Gandhi's humane method of influencing this man's consciousness? Having understood this, we can apply it to crisis counselling in personal life.

2. A Philosophical View of Crisis

What this sequence makes quite clear, however, is that a feeling can suddenly be reversed. The Hindu had intended to take revenge. This feeling changed suddenly. I think, you may possibly have already experienced such a turnaround of love into hatred or vice versa. The more you love somebody, the more you could hate them. We find another example in strength and weakness. In The Bible God says: "my power is made perfect in weakness." (Corinthians 12,9).

Philosophy uses the term *polarity* to explain this phenomenon. *Polarity* means all opposite terms definitely and originally belong together. They constitute each other in such a way that one grows out of the other and vice versa. For example: life and death, day and night, above and below, right and left etc. Day emerges from night, and the reverse is also true. This applies to all opposites because they have the same roots and origins. According to Plato polarity is the key for understanding life and all its phenomena. All life is polar because polarity is the underlying context of life. The idea of polarity is based on two halves which originally belong together and form the One whole. At the very beginning there *was* only this One whole. It then split up into two halves and from that time on these two halves have been smelting to regain their original state and become whole again. During this time, a process of development occurs. The better we perceive this process and recognize the meaning, the more development occurs in our consciousness. In other words: consciousness may only be developed by experiencing, by learning, by opening the mind for sense and meaning. The final result and perfect form of this developing of consciousness will be the spirit which is defined as highest and best developed consciousness. In the spirit there will be no more polarity between consciousness and meaning. Nothing is inconceivable to the spirit. This is basis of Hegelian philosophy. This idea can well be applied to the pedagogy of crisis counselling because crisis is a very appropriate incident to initiate especial and extraordinary processes of mental development.

I am going to give you an example to help you understand the idea of polarity. My example is hidden in a puzzle: which one was first, the

chicken or the egg? Since every egg comes from a chicken and every chicken from an egg, the puzzle seems to be unsolvable. You can apply the same question to any other polarity. Which one was first, day or night, life or death, right or left, above or below, inhale or exhale etc.?

Nevertheless, there is an answer to this question if we recognize that the question itself has been formulated wrongly. Within the question there is an assumption which says one of the two halves must have occurred first. This supposition prevents us from conceiving the circular structure because it underlays linear logic. This is the reason why the question will never be answered. Originally, egg and chicken constitute each other mutually. Every opposite [illegible] out of its opposite, says Plato. Therefore the egg emerges from the [illegible]n and, at the same time, the chicken emerges from the egg. Please [illegible]der that this philosophy refers to the origin and emergence of the po[illegible]y, not to the empirical viewpoints. Here you see the circularity, the polarity, and the same origin of egg and chicken.

If this is acceptable as the basis of life, there is no doubt that also crisis has an opposite out of which it grows. The opposite is called *mental development*, a process which always accompanies the understanding of the meaning or message of the crisis. Whenever you have been successful in dealing with a crisis, you have also been going through a process of mental development or have simply been learning something which you would not have learnt without the crisis. We never understand the message of a crisis unless we are in one. To be in the middle of a crisis always means to be learning something extraordinary. We have to move mentally if we want to move out of the crisis. From this point of view crisis appears clearly to be only one half, and mental development obviously the other half. Both halves together, part and counterpart, form the polarity. So crisis and mental development, have the same origin. *One* can suddenly turn into the other and vice versa. I think every crisis is a great and unique chance for an individual to open his consciousness for something very especial. By the way, in Chinese the word "crisis" is called "wei-ji". It is a composition of "wei" which means danger and "ji" which means chance. Danger and chance are one and the same. Better still, they are the two halves of the same unity.

If we accept the double halfness of human life, we realize spontaneously that all beings and everything in the world must have suffered the same separation when the One whole split up into two halves. Humans, animals, plants and stones are parts of the same original motherly One. Gandhi speaks of "All-Love". It is the love to all creatures and to everything that reveals our cosmic desire to return to the origin. What is this origin? You may say God, if you believe, you may say singularity if you prefer to use physics terminology. Singularity is the state before the big bang occurred. Before the big bang matter and energy were not yet split up into polarity. Einstein found in his great formula that matter and energy are the two halves of the same. Unity seems to be the origin of polarity, and it seems that every polarity tends towards reunification.

I am going to apply this idea to the pedagogy of crisis counselling. I suppose that every crisis has a polar half, called mental development. And I suppose that the search for new meaning or sense is equal to the process of this mental development. Every new sense includes some development of the consciousness. A crisis forces us to find a meaning, so it forces us to develop our consciousness. pedagogy is called upon to perform research and discover models and methods of conveying meaning.

3. Pedagogy and Crisis Counselling

What can this mean for pedagogy? In my opinion pedagogy is a science that prepares youth for society life. Pedagogy educates people, teaching them a number of subjects which are necessary for modern-day life. We do not wait until children fall into water and drown. Instead we teach them to swim at an early age. I think it would be useful if pedagogy taught people - both young and old - to develop a feeling for life crisis and the oppurtunity for mental development which is hidden within it. Do you really know how to manage a crisis such as being disappointed by a friend or failing in exams? Not to mention joblessness, divorce, a serious car accident, illness, the death of parents or a child! pedagogy can and may not wait until such a crisis occurs and then send the clients to therapists. pedagogy is called upon to become active and prepare people for the meaning of crisis before it happens. To sensitize people to the meaning of life crisis is the aim of the pedagogy of crisis counselling. This sensitivity or preparation certainly does not protect from crisis but it does increase

your resistance to despair. To clarify this via a comparision, if a ship is sinking the passangers are in danger. But if you can swim, your chances of survival are higher. pedagogy must do something similar in relation to crisis. We have to learn and make people learn to search for the meaning of a crisis. Every crisis should be considered as a task. We are forced or invited to understand the meaning of the crisis. It seems as if life wants us to fulfil something. It is not for us to ask of life "why me?" The point is, life and destiny are actually asking us something by way of the crisis.

After these theoretical and philosophical aspects I am now going to explain some practical aspects of crisis counselling and give you concrete examples. The main task of the pedagogy of crisis counselling is to turn the backward view of the person into a forward one. After entering a crisis, most people sponaneously ask "why?" or worse still: "why me?, why not somebody else?" This question wants to regain what has been lost for ever. There is something resembling accusation in this question. It wants destiny to repair, what has happened. There is no way out of this question. Once you ask it, you will never get a future perspective. You are always looking back.

Let us now try to understand what a crisis wants us to fulfil. I define crisis as a breakdown within the continuity and normality of daily life. For example, you are going to the university as you do every morning, but suddenly you have an accident and are in hospital for three weeks. This breakdown is an Act of God. If you ask "why?", you take a higher position than destiny. This is why you will never get an answer to this question. The sooner you stop asking this question, the better your chance to turn the crisis into a mental development.

The way out of the crisis begins with another question, with "what for?" or "what is the meaning?" Such questions spontaneously open up future perspectives (Elisabeth Lukas). This is the key to searching for the meaning of a crisis. Whoever succeeds in changing the question "why" into "what for", takes the first and most difficult step out of the crisis. This change is a change in the consciousness. And here you see the beginning of the process of mental development. The sight is now focused on the future. The question is: what should I learn in this situation that I could never have been learning in previous ones? Which sense am I called to fulfil? What could be the message of the crisis to me personally? Asking in this

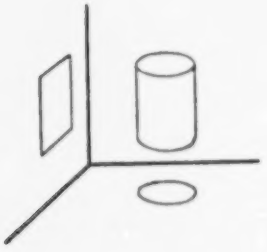
way, one relies on a hidden meaning. The moment a person begins to look for the meaning, the first step to finding is taken. You will never find anything unless you start searching.

I would like to tell you a story I have been told by one of my students. Her mother was in a conflict of decision between two men. She believed she loved them both, some time more the one, another time more the other one. The conflict paralysed her whole life in such a way that she was not able to concentrate or work any more. She even considered suicide. She was, without a doubt, in a deep life crisis. The inability to decide with the head what had to be done by the heart, must be considered as a breakdown in the continuity and normality of her life. In this situation her therapist said she should go on a journey and gain distance to her problem. She agreed and booked a journey but the day before she was meant to leave, she fell down the stairs and broke her leg badly. Such incidents are typical during a crisis, as if destiny were going to say, "you haven't yet had enough". Instead of lying in the sun, she was now lying in the clinic. "Why?" "If I only knew, why?", she wondered, when her daughter came to visit her. The daughter, immediately changing the question "why" into "what for", asked her mother: "O dear what have you been falling for? What might possibly have been the purpose of breaking your leg? What can you discover in this passivity that no activity would bring out?" And suddenly the mother discovered a context of meaning. "Only in this situation will I reach a decision. The various activities of the journey would never have allowed me to make up my mind."

As you see, the pedagogy of crisis counselling can make people sensitive to the hidden message of crises. There is no incident in life that could ever be considered meaningless. This is the basis of the Logotherapy of Viktor E. Frankl. Even a person who doesn't want to live any more and attempts suicide, considers his last act as meaningful. Otherwise he would not go on with it. Man's life is based on meaning and sense. We all search for sense and fulfilling meaning during the course of our lives. We may not always be aware of this. However, a crisis situation brings it clearly into our consciousness. From this point of view crisis is simply the opportunity for finding or fulfilling a meaning. To search for a sense and fulfillment of meaning is equal to mental development. It is up to us which sense we individually discover in a crisis. The Promoter of sense finding is our consciousness. To go through a crisis means to be invited to understand

the meaning of the crisis. To have understood the meaning of a crisis is the same as having learnt something essential for life.

Viktor Frankl who is the initiator of Logotherapy (therapy centered on meaning) has visualized the searching and finding of meaning by a simple graphic.



Dimensional ontology of Viktor E. Frankl (graphic nr. 1)

If we project a cylinder from the higher order three-dimensional space into the lower order two-dimensional space we get two quite different figures, a circle and a rectangle. If we do not know the source of these two figures, we would say that they are incompatible. So it is in life. If you need to solve a problem for a crisis and you see no solutions, you must climb to a higher level of consciousness. Within the two-dimensional space there is no possibility to find a connection between a circle and a rectangle. If you climb up to a wider context, you easily discover the common origin of them. Here you have the visualization of mental development.

I am now going to give you an example of Frankl's own experience. A doctor whose wife had died a few years ago, could not overcome his crisis. He was suffering from loss and depression. So he came to Frankl and asked him for help. If you wanted to help this man, what would you do? What can be done? The wife cannot be reanimated. After talking a while and clarifying some points, Frankl asked him: "What would have happened, if you had died first, and not your wife?" "O God", he answered, "this would have been an incredible catastrophy for her. She would have suffered

much more than I do." Frankl then said: "Can you imagine that you have saved her from such suffering? If you can, are you ready to pay for it with your own depression?" This changing view suddenly freed the doctor from his senseless suffering. From this moment on he understood the "what for" of his suffering. Knowing what one is suffering for, means suffering *for* something, not *from* something. You can accept any pain if you only know what it is good for.

This is called dimensionality which means that in the search for sense we repeatedly find ourselves in a dead-end and see no way out. But dimensionality confirms and supports the meaningfulness of life in any case. Life always has meaning; every life has its own meaning. If a situation seems senseless or pointless to us, we should remember that we might be searching in a wrong dimension. There are countless dimensions in which sense and fulfilling meaning can be searched for. So the pedagogy of crisis counselling has a new field of research. You are all invited to help. You can help your friends or you can help yourself. Just look out for other dimensions of meaning in your daily life and you will discover a versatile world of meaning. This will then be your capital in times of crisis. Don't expect too much from pedagogy. Don't expect instant solutions to categorized crises. Rather become sensitive for what life wants you to do by sending you a crisis.

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